

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
----- 128301

R 041833Z MAR 76
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8487
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 06640

EXDIS

E. O. 11652: XGDS
TAGS: PFOR, FR, SS
SUBJECT: FRENCH VIEWS ON THE SAHARA

1. FOLLOWING REPORT SUPPLEMENTS VIEWS OF QUAI SECRE-
TARY GENERAL DE COURCEL GIVEN TO ASSISTANT SECRETARY
ATHERTON ON MARCH 3 (PARIS 6639), AND REITERATES GOF
CONCERN OVER SAHARA PROBLEM, ALBEIT IN SLIGHTLY MORE
PESSIMISTIC VEIN. COMING FROM A RANKING GAULLIST
MINISTER WHO HAS GISCARD D'ESTAING'S CONFIDENCE, HIS
COMMENTS ARE OF INTEREST.

2. SUMMARY: DURING PRIVATE CONVERSATION MARCH 1ST,
COOPERATION MINISTER JEAN DE LIPKOWSKI (PROTECT -
NOFORN) WAS INCREASINGLY CONCERNED OVER DIMINISHING
INFLUENCE OF WEST IN AFRICA TO BENEFIT OF SOVIET UNION
FOLLOWING DEFEAT IN ANGOLA. RE SAHARA, HE BELIEVES
SOVIETS WILL TRY TO EXPLOIT THIS ISSUE, THEIR RELATIONS
WITH MOROCCO NOTWITHSTANDING. WHILE NOT NOW CONCERNED
OVER HASSAN'S ABILITY TO DEFEND HIMSELF, HE AND GISCARD
D'ESTAING APPREHENSIVE OVER FAR EASIER CHOICE OF AN
ALGERIAN-POLISARIO MOVE AGAINST MAURITANIA. RE
BOUMEDIENNE'S CURRENT THINKING, LIPKOWSKI BELIEVES HE
MAY BE SEEKING FACE-SAVING WAY OUT. BOUMEDIENNE HAS
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FLOATED IDEA OF PRIVATE, UNOFFICIAL MEETING WITH

LIPKOWSKI. LATTER AGAINST SUCH A MOVE AND BELIEVES GISCARD WILL AGREE WITH HIM. HASSAN'S RETENTION ON THRONE IS IN FRANCE'S INTEREST, AS HIS REMOVAL COULD OPEN AREA TO EXTENSIVE PENETRATION. IT IS THEREFORE NECESSARY TO FIND FACE-SAVING FORMULA FOR BOUMEDIENNE ASAP. END SUMMARY.

3. DURING TWO-HOUR LUNCHEON ON MARCH 1 AT HIS HOME WITH AMBASSADOR ROBERT ANDERSON, COOPERATION MINISTER JEAN DE LIPKOWSKI SAID HE WAS BECOMING INCREASINGLY CONCERNED OVER THE DIMINISHING INFLUENCE OF THE WEST IN AFRICA TO THE BENEFIT OF THE SOVIET UNION. CONVERSATIONS HE HAS HAD DURING VISITS TO EIGHT BLACK AFRICAN COUNTRIES SINCE ASSUMING HIS PORTFOLIO ON JANUARY 12 HAVE CONVINCED HIM THAT THE LEADERS IN THESE COUNTRIES SIMPLY CANNOT UNDERSTAND HOW THE SOVIET UNION AND CUBA COULD HAVE BEEN PERMITTED TO INFLICT SUCH A DEFEAT IN ANGOLA. LIPKOWSKI ADDED PARENTHETICALLY THAT THE UNFORTUNATE PARALYSIS OF THE ADMINISTRATION IN THE FACE OF CONGRESSIONAL OPPOSITION TO AID TO ANGOLA AND TO CIA GENERALLY WAS NOTHING SHORT OF A DISASTER.

4. TAKING INITIATIVE IN DISCUSSING THE SAHARA PROBLEM, LIPKOWSKI BELIEVES THAT THE SOVIETS WILL DEFINITELY TRY TO EXPLOIT THIS ISSUE, THEIR RELATIONS WITH MOROCCO NOTWITHSTANDING. AS BOUMEDIENNE (A) BECOMES MORE AND MORE ISOLATED IN THE ARAB WORLD, (B) FINDS IT IMPOSSIBLE TO OBTAIN SUBSTANTIAL SUPPORT IN BLACK AFRICA AND (C) FACES MOUNTING TROUBLES AT HOME, HIS RELIANCE ON SOVIET SUPPORT MAY INCREASE. WHILE NOT NOW OVERLY CONCERNED WITH HASSAN'S ABILITY TO DEFEND HIMSELF, LIPKOWSKI AND, HE SAYS, GISCARD D'ESTAING ARE APPREHENSIVE OVER THE FAR EASIER CHOICE OF AN ALGERIAN-POLISARIO MOVE AGAINST MOUKHTAR OULD DADDAH IN MAURITANIA. IF MOUKHTAR IS REPLACED BY A LEFTIST REGIME, MOROCCAN POSITION MIGHT WELL BECOME UNTENABLE IN SAHARA, AND EVENTUALLY FOR HASSAN HIMSELF. LIPKOWSKI CONCLUDED HIS SCENARIO WITH BOURGUIBA'S POSSIBLE DOWNFALL AND A GREATLY ENHANCED SOVIET POSITION ALONG THE NORTH AND NORTHWEST AFRICAN LITTORALS FROM LIBYA

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THROUGH MAURITANIA.

5. REGARDING MOUKHTAR'S POSITION, LIPKOWSKI MENTIONED THAT TUNISIAN INTELLIGENCE VERY RECENTLY INFORMED HIM OF REPORTS OF AN IMPENDING MOVE TO UNSEAT THE GIRM PRESIDENT. ON INSTRUCTIONS FROM GISCARD, LIPKOWSKI SENT HIS CONSEILLER TECHNIQUE HELIE DE NOAILLES TO NOUAKCHOTT TO INFORM MOUKHTAR OF REPORT WITHOUT RE-

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ACTION SS-25

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R 041833Z MAR 76
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AMEMBASSY RABAT
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VEALING SOURCE (AT TUNISIAN REQUEST) AND BE PREPARED TO OFFER LIMITED HELP (PERSONAL PROTECTION AND POSSIBLE REORGANIZATION OF PRESIDENTIAL GUARD). MOUKHTAR WAS UNCONCERNED ABOUT REPORTS, AND THEREFORE FRENCH HELP NOT OFFERED. A SUBSEQUENT DE NOAILLES TALK WITH A RANKING GIRM OFFICIAL IN NOUAKCHOTT, HOWEVER, EVOKED CONSIDERABLE CONCERN OVER MOUKHTAR'S FUTURE. NB: LIPKOWSKI UNDERLINED SENSITIVITY OF THIS INFORMATION, WHICH IS NOT KNOWN TO FRENCH AMBASSADOR IN NOUAKCHOTT OR TO QUAI D'ORSAY.

6. ASKED ABOUT BOUMEDIENNE'S CURRENT ATTITUDE, LIPKOWSKI BELIEVES HE MAY BE SEEKING A FACE-SAVING WAY OUT. DURING RECENT MEETING IN ALGIERS WITH GEORGES MONTARAN, DIRECTOR OF TEMOINAGE CHRETIEN (LEFT-LEANING CATHOLIC WEEKLY) AND LONG-TIME FRIEND OF LIPKOWSKI, BOUMEDIENNE CASTIGATED FRANCE'S SUPPORT OF MOROCCO ADDING THAT GISCARD IN U.S. POCKET, AND THEN SAID HE WANTED TO "MAKE ONE MORE TRY" FOR PEACEFUL SOLUTION, PERHAPS THROUGH A GAULLIST HE COULD TRUST, NAMELY LIPKOWSKI (WHO HAS IMPECCABLE GAULLIST CREDENTIALS AND ENJOYS FAVORED STANDING IN ARAB WORLD). BOUMEDIENNE ASKED MONTARON TO RELAY FOREGOING PRIVATELY TO

LIPKOWSKI. SUGGESTION FOR A PRIVATE, UNOFFICIAL VISIT
BY LIPKOWSKI IS NOW ON GISCARD'S DESK. CONVINCED THAT
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SAHARAN PROBLEM SHOULD REMAIN A REGIONAL, INTRA-ARAB
AFFAIR WITHOUT MEDIATION BY THE WEST, AND THAT BOU-
MEDIENNE WOULD EXPLOIT SUCH A "PRIVATE" VISIT TO
FRANCE'S DETRIMENT, LIPKOWSKI IS AGAINST IDEA, AND
BELIEVES GISCARD WILL AGREE WITH HIM.

7. IN CONCLUSION, LIPKOWSKI SAID GOF POSITION IS CLEAR
AND FIRM--HASSAN'S RETENTION ON THE THRONE IS IN
FRANCE'S INTEREST, AS HIS REMOVAL COULD OPEN AREA TO
EXTENSIVE SOVIET PENETRATION. IN HIS VIEW, BEST WAY
TO ENSURE HASSAN REMAINS AT HELM IS TO FIND FACE-SAVING
FORMULA FOR BOUMEDIENNE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. SUCH A
FORMULA, HE VOLUNTEERED, SHOULD FOCUS ON SUCH ELEMENTS
AS RATIFICATION OF 1972 AGREEMENT, INCLUDING JOINT
EXPLOITATION OF IRON ORE AT TINDOUF AND CORRIDOR TO
ATLANTIC; AND POSSIBLE AGREEMENT ON CONCESSIONAL
PHOSPHATE SALES TO ALGERIA FROM NEWLY ACQUIRED SAHARAN
DEPOSITS. FOR THIS TO SUCCEED, HASSAN MUST BE CON-
VINCED THAT THIS IS IN HIS LONG-TERM INTEREST, AND THAT
RESTRAINT ON HIS PART WILL PAY OFF. SPEAKING
PERSONALLY, LIPKOWSKI DOES NOT EXCLUDE APPROACH TO
HASSAN ALONG THIS LINE AND WILL BE DISCUSSING THIS WITH
GISCARD.
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